

GORGAS HOSPITAL, MAIN STAIRS AND
PASSAGEWAYS

Gorgas and Culebra Roads
Balboa Heights Vicinity
Former Panama Canal Zone
Republic of Panama

HABS No. CZ-11-H

HABS
CZ
1-BALH.V
1H-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING^S SURVEY

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GORGAS HOSPITAL, MAIN STAIRS AND PASSAGEWAYS

~~(Gorgas Hospital, Main Stairs and Passageways)~~

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For information about other structures at Gorgas Hospital, see:

HABS No. CZ-11	GORGAS HOSPITAL
HABS No. CZ-11-A	ADMINISTRATION AND CLINICS (Building 237)
HABS No. CZ-11-B	KITCHEN AND MESS (Building 238)
HABS No. CZ-11-C	SHOPS AND BOILER HOUSE (Buildings 240 and 240A)
HABS No. CZ-11-D	ISOLATION WARD (Building 242)
HABS No. CZ-11-E	SECTIONS A AND B (Buildings 255 and 253)
HABS No. CZ-11-F	SECTION O (Obstetrical Building, Building 261)
HABS No. CZ-11-G	MORTUARY AND CHAPEL (Building 257)

Location: Gorgas and Culebra Roads, Balboa Heights, Former Panama Canal Zone, Republic of Panama

Present Owner: United States Department of Defense

Original Use: Main stair and passageways connecting hospital buildings

Present Use: Same

Significance: The formal classical details of the main stairs and the covered passageways contribute architecturally to the complex's overall layout design and provided an important function by connecting the complex buildings and the two main terraces upon which the hospital was situated.

A. General Statement:

1. History:

While no architectural drawings were identified for the main stair that connects the Administration and Clinics courtyard elevation with Gorgas Road which is substantially lower, it is presumed that Samuel M. Hitt was its architect. Hitt was the architect for the Building Division of the Panama Canal when the stairs were constructed and the other passageways built during this era in the complex are attributed to him. *The Panama Canal Record* noted in August of 1916 that the main staircase was under construction and that it was 100% complete with the requisite backfilling and grading by January of 1917. This stair which provides the most direct access between the two main terraces upon which the hospital was situated was no doubt heavily used by the hospital nurses who were quartered at its base on the opposite side of Gorgas Road. The passageways appear to be completed with the individual buildings to which they are attached. Echoing the French hospital plan that preceded the American installation, these passageways integrated the many hospital buildings into one and allowed the pavilion style layout of the complex to work.

The 1918 *Annual Report of the Governor of the Panama Canal* noted that the total length of covered passageways connecting the different buildings, including the porch passages incorporated into buildings, was estimated at 6,800 feet. The passageways that linked the Administration Buildings, Kitchen and Mess, Isolation Wards, and Sections A and B were constructed by the Building Division of the Panama Canal's Department of Operation and Maintenance between 1915 and 1919. The bridge that connects Section B with Section O was designed by Meade Bolton and was constructed between 1948 and 1951 under the direction of the Panama Canal Company's Department of Operation and Maintenance. After construction, all passageways remained in the possession of the Panama Canal Company until transferred to the Department of Defense in 1979 in accordance with the Panama Canal Treaty of 1977.

2. Architectural Character:

The Main stairs are formal, acting as the main introduction to the complex. They delicately bridge the two built-out terraces, acting as a concrete transition across the green bank that separates them and they allow relief from the visual expanse of solid concrete that Sections A, B and O create. The street lights positioned at each landing provide even greater formality. The fabric of the main

stairs is in good condition. It is currently cut off from use from the base on Gorgas Road by a chain link fence which surrounds the USA Meddac complex.

The concrete passageways also offer a delicate transition between the monumental buildings they connect. Architectural details within the buildings are articulated in the companion passageways as Hitt kept the complex architecturally harmonious. Most of the passageways are in fair condition. With the exception of the passageway that connects the Isolation Ward to the Kitchen and Mess Building, none have been painted and many exhibit a reddish patina. No modifications to their historic fabric has occurred.

B. Description:

The Main Stair begins and ends as a single stairway that splits into a double stairway one third of the distance down the front terrace. It is composed of seven sets of stairs interspersed with landings that bridge the upper terrace of the Administration and Clinics terrace with the lower terrace at the Gorgas Road street level. The balusters and handrail are concrete. The recessed area below the central stair is complemented by a rusticated arch and a plaque honoring Colonel Gorgas that was placed in this area in 1928. The plaque bears the following inscription:

William Crawford Gorgas
Soldier of Humanity
Born Mobile, Alabama October 3, 1854
A.B. Sewanee College 1875
M.D. Bellevue Hospital 1879
Entered Medical Corps US Army 1880
Health Officer Habana 1898-1902
Colonel US Army by Special Act of Congress 1903
Chief Sanitary Officer Isthmian Canal Commission 1904-1914
Surgeon General US Army 1914-1918
Died London July 4, 1920
Erected by Spanish American War Veterans

*"Peace Has Her Victories
No Less Renowned Than War"*

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The passageways between the Administration and Clinics Building and Sections A and B are identical. Both are raised and incorporate a flat arched porte cochere that extends across Culebra Road. Heavy columns support each corner of the porte cochere which is further defined by engaged pilasters on the arch interiors; a series of flat arches supported by piers complete the base of the passageway. Columns with concrete molded caps support the open raised passageway that features a concrete parapet with inset panels and decorative upraised bullets. A cluster of columns helps support each end at the joining of the passageway with the buildings. The passageways have gable roofs finished with Spanish tile; the porte cochere is hipped with Spanish tile. Spotlights and a round metal handrail have been added to each passageway.

The passageway that connects the end elevations of Sections A and B and the main stair is bowed. It is supported on both floors by single and clustered columns and the parapet is detailed with inset panels. A dripstone course extends across the passageway at the same height as the dripstone course on each section building. The front elevation which connects with the main stair carries the name of the hospital on its central architrave. Spotlights and a curved metal handrail have also been added to this passageway.

The passageway that connects the Administration and Clinics Building to the Kitchen and Mess Buildings and connects the two passages within the wings of the Administration and Clinics Building is cruciform in shape and approximately 8'5" wide. Supported by columns with molded concrete caps, the passageway that leads from the Administration and Clinics Building to the Kitchen and Mess Building incorporates two rectangular porte cocheres with hipped roofs. The porte cocheres are identical in detail but different in size. The porte cochere that leads to the Administration and Clinics Building is larger, measuring 18'9" by 24'. The port cochere with access to the Kitchen and Mess Building is 17'5' by 10'4". Both porte cocheres are supported by large corner columns with inset panels and wheel guards. The openings are flat arches with keystones and a triangular inset panel occurs in each corner of the north and south elevation. The passageway has a gable Spanish tile roof, the porte cocheres' hipped roofs are finished with Spanish tile. This passageway also has exterior lighting

The passageway connecting the Isolation Ward and the Kitchen and Mess Building is arched on the base and supported on its upper story by columns with molded caps. It extends over an access road that bounds the north side of the Isolation Ward and leads to the loading area behind the Kitchen and Mess Building. A waist high chain link fence has taken the place of the original wooden balustrade shown on a historic view of the Isolation Ward. This passageway, like the Isolation Ward, is painted a cream color.

The bridge or passageway constructed between Section O (Obstetrical Building, Building 261) and Section B over Gorgas Road is similar in design and in materials to the earlier passageways designed by Hitt but has less detail. Supported by large concrete piers, the reinforced concrete bridge has rectangular openings supported by short columns and a dripstone course. The roof is gabled and finished with Spanish tile. A metal curved handrail has been added for safety between each column.

1. Structural System:

The stairs are built of reinforced concrete with concrete balustrade and walls. The passageways are constructed of reinforced concrete.

C. Site:

1. General Setting and Orientation:

The main stair faces east and fronts on Gorgas Road. It is currently inaccessible as it is fenced off with chain link. The passageway locations have all been noted above. The area between the Administration and Clinics Building and the Kitchen and Mess is currently used for parking. Diagonal parking is permitted along the Administration and Clinics rear elevation and the front elevation of the Kitchen and Mess Building. Parking spaces are also provided in the area between the porte cocheres. Informal parking on grass areas adjacent to the passageways and the buildings also occurs.

2. Historic Landscape Design:

Only the plans for the passageway between the Administration and Clinics Building and the Kitchen and Mess Building show and landscaping details. The area abreast of the central passage between the two porte cocheres was to be lined with grass and curbed. It is now used for parking.

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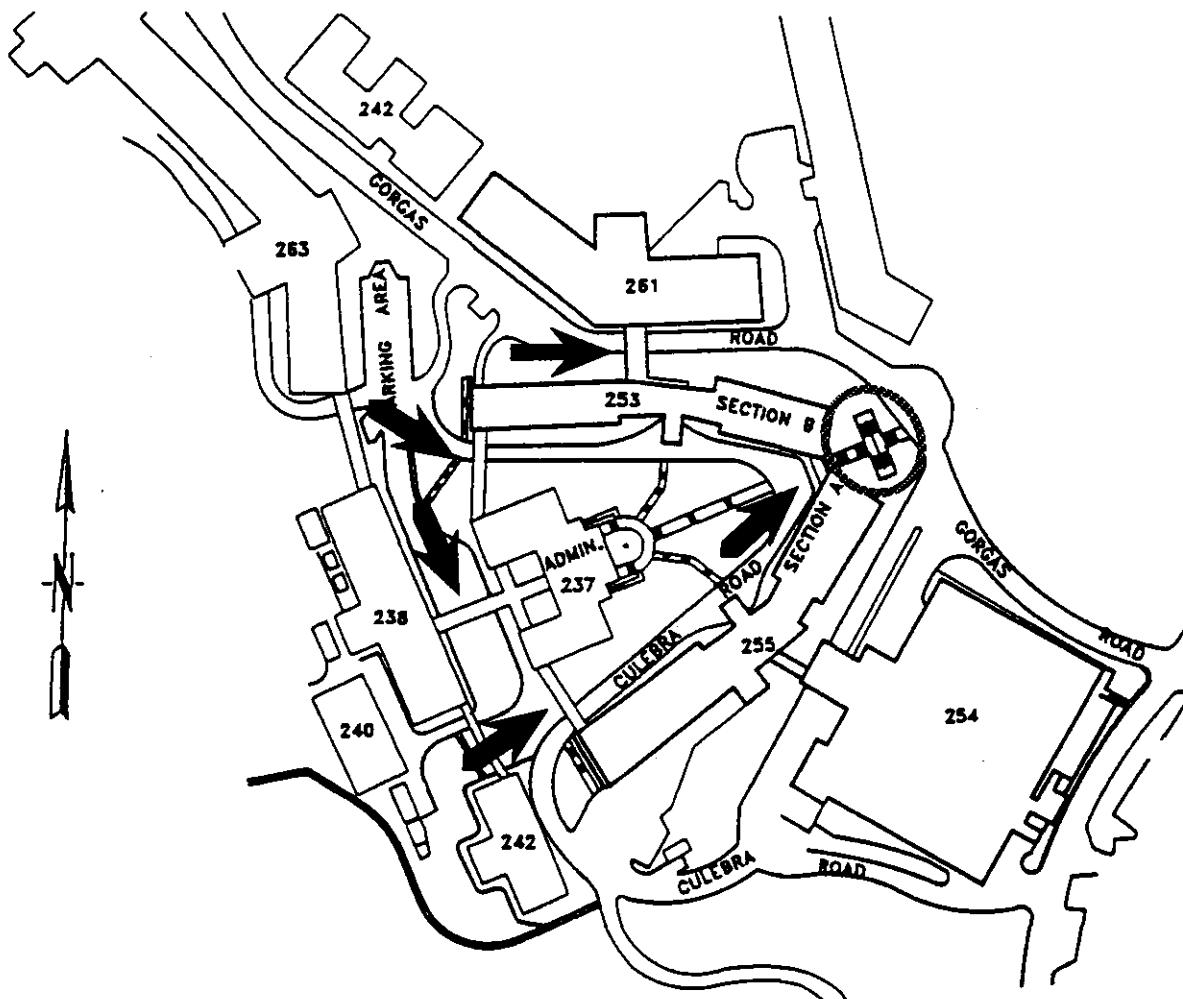


Figure 1 Map, 1996 (original located at Real Property Office, Coroza).
Mapmaker unknown.
GORGAS ARMY HOSPITAL COMPLEX